

Published April 1, 2024. Editor's Headline: Attack on Tesla

https://www.thecheyennepost.com/opinion/columnists/attack-on-tesla/article_ca498596-f062-11ee-984a-ffe18590b080.html

A few days into my visit to Germany, radio and TV news reported a major arson attack on the Tesla plant near Berlin, known as Gigafactory Berlin-Brandenburg. Since my cousin and her husband, with whom I stayed, are addicted to radio news, over and over I heard about the scandalous event. Arsonists set fire to an electricity pylon that delivered power to the factory and to surrounding communities. Police announced it was a deliberate attack that cut off the power supply, which forced Tesla to halt production. That day, the manufacture of 1,000 cars was delayed, according to local newspaper reports.

Tesla's sole European plant opened on March 22nd, 2022. It boasts the latest and grandest of mechanical wonders, the giga presses that assemble its Model Y. The presses are so large, explains a YouTube post, they “could easily swallow your apartment and still have room to spare.” The machines weigh over 400 tons each and measure 20 meters by 7.5 meters by 6 meters—that's 66 feet by 25 feet by 20 feet. Transporting them to their workplace required 20 flatbed trucks.

Tesla has been pushing to expand the factory to include a rail freight depot, but to do so, it would have to cut down 100 acres of forest near a nature preserve. Moreover, environmental groups pointed out, the expansion would negatively affect a nearby water protection area. Local government officials are trying to change the plans to make them acceptable.

Europeans are painfully aware of the climate changes happening in their environs; hence, they are frugal to a fault in the use of energy. In my cousin's town of 2,000, practically every roof is outfitted with solar panels. My cousin and her family consume meat only on special occasions; instead, they use tofu and fresh vegetables, some of which they harvest daily in their gardens. Although an electric dryer sits next to the washing machine, my cousin rarely uses it. She hangs up the laundry to dry outside; when it rains, she unfolds a scaffolding in the house on which to dry the clothes. Where once their furnace ran on petroleum, they installed a newer one that uses pellets. Even that is rarely used, since they feed wood into a *Kachelofen* stove, a type of masonry stove made of specialized stove tiles and other refractory material, which warms their kitchen and living areas. Their adult children and grandkids ride their bikes to train stations and take the train to work or school. Trains and buses run on electric power, which makes them wonderfully quiet.

Naturally, Germans look askance at flatbed trucks transporting huge machines to a factory. In addition to the transport pollution, the work of big machines consumes big energy. Within months of its opening, two small arson attempts happened, perhaps a warning of things to come.

On March 5, 2024, the factory came to a sudden and unceremonial halt. Power was restored to the surrounding communities by evening, but the Tesla plant was out of commission for seven days. Tesla CEO Elon Musk flew in to witness the resumption of business, adding his take to the blare of talking heads. By then a far-left group, Vulkangruppe (“Volcano Group”) claimed

responsibility for the attack. It did not divulge a motive but confined itself to “Today we sabotaged the Tesla plant.” No suspect has been apprehended.

When Musk put in his two cents’ worth after power was restored and production resumed on March 12, 2024, he blasted the attack as “extremely dumb.” Why the arsonists would target the production of ecofriendly automobiles was beyond him, he said. Musk arrived in his private jet, of course, which only added to the unease of Europeans who try to keep emissions low to nil.

No politician inquired into the whys and wherefores of the arsonists, confining themselves to repeating Musk’s condemnation of the perpetrators. My hosts have theories of their own on what’s behind the attacks.

“The water isn’t there,” said my cousin’s husband. “Brandenburg had no underground aquifers—and, gigantic as it is, Elon Musk wants to double the size of the plant.”

When electric vehicles came online, people were excited that a better alternative to fossil fuel-powered cars was available, an alternative not only good for the automobile industry but also for the environment. In Europe, however, concerns have been raised that electric cars are not as ecofriendly as previously thought. Tesla’s carbon footprint is coming into focus, and it’s bigger than the company let on in the past.



Gigafactory Berlin-Brandenburg, July 2023

(Wikipedia Commons)

Website tesla.com/giga-berlin

A company’s carbon footprint is usually divvied up into three main groups or “scopes.” Scope 1 includes direct emissions from its factories, offices, and vehicles. Scope 2 encompasses emissions from its electricity use, heating, and cooling.

Scope 3 comprises all the other indirect emissions from supply chains and the lifecycle of the company's products.

It's common practice for companies to share only their Scope 1 and 2 emissions, which makes their carbon footprints appear smaller than they are. Tesla's Scope 1 and 2 emissions, for example, added up to 610,000 metric tons of CO₂ in 2022. That's minuscule in comparison to the company's indirect Scope 3 emissions.

In 2022, the company disclosed only how much greenhouse gas pollution it generated from its direct operations and from customers charging their EVs. But that missed the big picture since supply chain pollution — considered indirect emissions — makes up a major chunk of a company's carbon footprint.

In 2023, Tesla released data on its supply chain emissions for 2022, which is equivalent to roughly 30.7 million tons of carbon dioxide. That's a huge change from what the company reported the previous year.

Ford Motor's carbon footprint in 2022 was bigger than Tesla's at more than 337 million metric tons of CO₂ (nearly all were Scope 3 emissions). But Ford sold more than three times as many vehicles as Tesla, and most Ford cars are gas-guzzlers.

Tesla's Giga-Berlin website is about the European plant; Tesla.com shows charts and information on all the plants in the US, China, and elsewhere. It's extensive reading.